



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 120

CREATING THE EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE -- BUILDING A "STRENGTH-BASED" ORGANIZATION (PART 13)

The Twelve Questions

The importance of properly setting expectations for employees.

Question 1: "I know what is expected of me at work."

Expectations are the milestones against which we test our progress. Within the workplace, knowing what is expected can be viewed as the pathway that guides us toward achievement. If expectations are not clear, we are hesitant, indecisive, and unsure of ourselves.

The importance of properly setting expectations for employees is one of the 12 key discoveries from a multiyear research effort by The Gallup Organization. The objective of the research was to identify the consistent dimensions of quality workplaces (those in which four critical outcomes -- employee retention, customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitability--are all at high levels). The research identified 12 dimensions that consistently correlate with these 4 outcomes -- dimensions Gallup now uses to measure the health of a workplace. An associated research effort, in which Gallup studied more than 80,000 managers, focused on discovering what great managers do to create quality workplaces.

Setting clear expectations is not a new concept for managers. Sometimes in our attempts to set and define clear expectations, however, we often over-operationalize jobs. We put all of the focus on describing the steps to follow, and in doing so create an environment that communicates, "Check your mind at the door, follow these steps, and you will meet expectations." This roboticizing of humans builds little self-worth and self-confidence, and dramatically impairs quality output. When defining steps becomes the focus, setting expectations then becomes a question of how to control employees, rather than of how to guide very different people with very different styles toward productive outcomes.

So, how does a manager, who is held accountable for a team's performance, set expectations? The best managers tell us they define the right outcomes first, and then let each person find his or her own route toward those outcomes. This approach resolves the manager's dilemma. It allows for growth of the individual to occur via the individual's discovery of his or her own "path of least resistance." It appreciates and values differences between employee styles and flow, and allows individuals to use their strengths to their fullest potential.

This approach also encourages employees to take responsibility. Great managers want each employee to feel a certain amount of tension to achieve. Defining the right outcomes creates that tension and the thrill and pressure of being out there by oneself, having a very definite target.

We, of course, realize that every job has a certain number of steps associated with it. Some jobs have more of them than others do. The question is, do the steps support a clear perspective on the particular outcomes that are desired? Many times the steps actually obscure the outcome, and the result is mere activity that has no broader purpose.

Next: Question #2 of 12: "I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right."

Regards, FL Ames

Excerpted from: *"First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently."* For more information about the research and book, please refer to web site <http://www.gallup.com/poll/managing/grtwrkplc.asp>.

[Flag Voice Contents](#)

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